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Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era by Elaine Tyler May
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image—look at how all four national candidates in 1988 could lay claim to it (as in the Bentsen-Quayle debate)—and by its resistance to rational correction. It is easy to dispose of the Camelot nonsense, yet the Kennedy administration was a turning point in the official recognition of the arts, and it did finally give great impetus to both the civil rights movement and the youthful rebellions of the 1960s. Although Johnson achieved far more on civil rights (partly by appealing to the Kennedy aura), blacks had every emotional reason to identify with a slain leader.

Despite its vagueness, which offers something for everyone, the Kennedy image has sometimes been closer to the truth than Brown allows. But even its fictional elements have had a potent influence. The myth itself has become part of our history, evoking a simpler, more hopeful era on which many Americans, liberals and conservatives alike, project their urgent wishes and needs.

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ELAINE TYLER MAY. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era.* New York: Basic Books. 1988. Pp. xi, 284. $20.95.

"Why did postwar Americans turn to marriage and parenthood with such enthusiasm and commitment?" (pp. 5–6) is the central question underlying Elaine Tyler May's new book. May's opinion of this turn is clear, and "it might have been otherwise" (p. 8) is the refrain of this book. Baldly stated, the question seems to presage an attack on those who threw away the opportunity (created by the disruptions and dislocations of depression and war) for a new configuration of gender roles. Instead, May offers a sensitive, nuanced reading of domestic ideology, judging but never blaming. Her men are not oppressors, her women not betrayers. But neither are they simply victims of circumstance or of forces beyond their control. May allows her subjects agency; she insists, time and time again, that they make choices. She then carefully explores the institutional, cultural, and historical constraints that shape and limit their choices. History has a long—and often dark—shadow in this book.

May begins this work with a striking image: a young couple, just married, plan to spend their honeymoon in a bomb shelter. They appear in *Life*, surrounded by the canned goods and consumer items that will stock the shelter, kissing for the cameras as they descend into their secure retreat. This, May argues, "is a powerful image of the nuclear family in the nuclear age: isolated, sexually charged, cushioned by abundance, and protected against impending doom by the wonders of modern technology" (p. 3).

In this thoughtful and imaginative book, May makes clear the connections between the nuclear family and the nuclear age, between the cold war and the "domestic revival" in postwar America. May looks to foreign policy, specifically containment, for what she argues is the central metaphor of the age. In fact, as May explains and demonstrates, containment is more than a metaphor: it is a strategy. According to contemporary political ideology, domestic stability and unity were crucial to waging the cold war, but modern American life threatened to undermine that stability. The home, it seemed, could contain the forces that might be disruptive—sex, affluence, women's aspirations—not only rendering those forces safe but also transforming them into sources of strength for the family and thus for America.

Although May consistently emphasizes the desire for security that propelled young Americans into the home (indeed, she sees security as the shared goal of foreign policy and domestic ideology), the people she describes are not simply fleeing the difficulties (foreign and domestic) of the postwar world, assuming a defensive posture in the suburban home/bomb shelter. "Rather than representing a retreat into private life," she argues, the new domesticity was "one way to express civic values" and to exert influence on the larger world (p. 136). If the family was the cornerstone of America's moral strength and thus, indirectly, of its security, then strengthening the family was a patriotic act.

Perhaps May's greatest success in this book is in showing the importance of prescription and cultural norms in shaping the meaning of individual experience. In addition to popular culture, demographic data, and the professional literature of various disciplines, May used the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS), a long-term psychological survey of three hundred (white, middle-class) married couples. The open-ended responses allowed in portions of the survey afford students of recent American history an unusual opportunity to hear the private voices of real people and to watch the interplay of convention and experience.

These men and women, in describing their lives, adopted the language of experts (the "psychological terminology popularized by professionals") and measured their "normality" against the Kinsey reports (p. 125). Most fascinating is May's discussion of the impact of sexual mores—"the sexual containment ethos," May calls it—on this group (p. 115). Although she offers nothing especially new in her description of the impact of "sexual containment" (psychologists and moralists proclaimed the dire consequences at the time), we find that the majority of men and women found their sexual adjustment in marriage largely determined by their reactions to the cultural imperatives against premarital sex. They, in general, reacted as the experts told them they would and called on such expertise to justify and explain their experiences.

There are some problems with this work. The initial image May offers us—the bomb shelter honeymoon as emblem of the cold war family—is striking but flawed. The postwar family was overwhelmingly child-centered. Those two weeks in a bomb shelter would have been a very different experience with three or four

small children. In fact, children are consistently slighted in May's analysis, figuring as decisions about procreation, sometimes as sources of pride, or as factors in their mothers' nervous breakdowns, but we get no real sense of the functioning or meaning of the family unit. May concentrates instead on the relations between husband and wife. Furthermore, her emphasis on the importance of sexuality in marriage (even if expectations were frustrated) seems overstated, judging by her presentation of the KLS data.

There are smaller quibbles. May's use of Hollywood as a barometer of popular culture is interesting but uneven, and frequent restatements of her thesis are sometimes intrusive, but the strengths of this book far outweigh any qualifications. May has made an important contribution to the current historical reassessment of the 1950s, has given voice to a much-maligned generation, and offers much to those of us—children of that era—who still seek the meanings of our parents' lives.

For all the poignance and eloquence of May's subjects as they reveal their hopes and dreams and disappointments, the words I will remember most are May's: "They made the choices they believed they had to make" (p. 207). It is a sympathetic picture, but still a grim one.

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MARK SILK. *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America since World War II.* New York: Simon and Schuster. 1988. Pp. 206. $19.95.

With this book Mark Silk has given general readers an engaging, well-written, and beguilingly brief chronicle of the role of organized religion in American society since the 1940s. His achievement in doing so should not be underestimated, for Silk manages to be learned at the same time that he is lucid.

This account is not church history as it is customarily rendered. Silk shuns the predictable features of the survey approach, such as an unstinting catalog of persons and their pronouncements, in favor of a kind of socially sensitive intellectual history in which distinct episodes that are nevertheless emblematic of America's special religious ethos are selected for discussion. That ethos, Silk believes, was constructed precariously atop a major fault line, a "tension . . . between exclusivist creeds," whose style he labels "conversion," and a "spiritually inclusive national faith," which he terms "adhesional" (p. 19). Americans, in other words, were ideally to value their particular religious commitments but not so much that those commitments submerged the common feelings that citizens were to share as Americans. As a result, however, any account of religion's place in American life is necessarily marked by a confusing oscillation between two apparently conflicting convictions, fused for all time (and for the continuing instruction of generations of historians) in a now-infamous utterance in 1952 by president-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower. "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith," Eisenhower was supposed to have said, adding, "and I don't care what it is" (p. 40).

A cornerstone of this structure of thought, Silk argues, was the synthetic notion of a "Judeo-Christian tradition," a device that he claims was invented during the war to bind religiously diverse Americans together in opposition to the forces of fascism in Europe and to its sympathizers everywhere. "The idea," notes Silk, "was to invoke a common faith for a united democratic front" against totalitarianism worldwide, to create "the spirituality of the American Way" (pp. 41, 44). Religion, then, came to be regarded as the principal source of Western, democratic, American values, and the country's "adhesional" faith had its glue. But how, within such a scheme, could the specific—and often contradictory—appeals of multiple religious creeds be accommodated? Delicate ecumenical diplomacy, accomplished more frequently by gestures of indirection than by ones of integrity, was the task of the day.

In spite of a recurrent theoretical insistence, this is not a book that is wanting for either historical scope or colorful anecdotes. Within allusions to Roman Catholicism alone, Silk treats converts to the faith as varied as Clare Boothe Luce, Thomas Merton, and Avery Dulles; advocates of the church's relevance to modern conditions as dissimilar as Jacques Maritain and Bishop Fulton Sheen; contenders over the morality of war as different as Dorothy Day, Francis Cardinal Spellman, and Daniel Berrigan; and writers on religious liberty as opposite as Jesuits Leonard Feeney (he of the "Boston Heresy": *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) and John Courtney Murray (who later served as architect of a momentous declaration on the subject by the Second Vatican Council).

Page for page, this volume condenses more authentic analytical depth and telling historical fact about the modern course of religion in the United States than almost any other volume currently for sale in trade bookstores, places where shelves dedicated to matters religious still sag under the weight of scriptures largely unread, personal testimonies gone unheeded, and inspirational tracts that border on the insipid.

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MICHAEL WOODIWISS. *Crime, Crusades, and Corruption: Prohibitions in the United States, 1900–1987.* Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble. 1988. Pp. ix, 260. $33.50.

As American as apple pie, moral crusades or prohibitions have been an integral aspect of modern American history. Generating tens of thousands of laws on the federal, state, and local levels, Americans have developed an active tradition of policing and regulating the social behavior of their neighbors. No wonder, then,